



**Access to State Government Information  
Solutions Work Group Access Committee**

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Present: Francine Stephenson  
Sue Farr  
Joel Sigmon  
Lucy Reid

Kristin Martin  
Jan Reagan  
Dennis Patterson  
Grant Pair

The Access Committee began by considering their goal of finding solutions for providing access to state government information, both current and historical. Members raised issues relating to access, comparing current models for finding state government information, came up with criteria needed for a good access tool, discussed current tools, and came up with recommendations for the work group.

**Issues/Concerns**

- Access is only valuable if it takes you directly to the information
- Government is decentralized so it is difficult to know where information is located
- Current access tools (Find NC, State Portal) do not work as well as they should
- 3 variables affect access, so a single solution will not suffice
  - differences between agencies
  - differences in user expectations
  - many potential technological solutions
- Cooperation is necessary between the creators and facilitators to come up with feasible solutions that creators will comply with.
- People want access to information immediately
- There is a lack of a statewide information policy on collection and dissemination of government information, including the webpage design, coordination of data sharing among agencies, and definitions for statistical data.
- Lack a sophistication of the public to evaluate the source of the information and distinguish between state government information and other information
- Agencies many hide information, or not provide information that should be public.
  - This can be a particular issue with databases when agencies have contracted out their data collection and management

## Access Tool Comparisons

	Positives	Negatives
<b>Search Engines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiar interface</li> <li>• one-stop shopping or nearly one-stop shopping</li> <li>• With good search algorithm and identification of resources, there is not much metadata work needed</li> <li>• Minimal work and compliance issues for state agencies</li> <li>• High recall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hard to find sites and maintain a good index – agencies would have to notify about new pages and updates</li> <li>• excludes databases and difficult to maintain currency on dynamically created pages</li> <li>• Low precision</li> <li>• Depending on search algorithm, metatags may not improve results</li> <li>• Older information may not be distinguishable from newer results</li> </ul>
<b>Library Catalog</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive descriptive information allows for more precise searching</li> <li>• Can tie-in to other library resources</li> <li>• Familiar environment for librarians</li> <li>• Easier to distinguish new information from older information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be unfamiliar or too complicated for the general user who may prefer the search engine model</li> <li>• Could require more work by state agencies/and or information facilitators in metadata creation</li> </ul>

## Features Needed in a good access tool

1. Metadata is key:
  - a. provides trust and reliability about the information it describes
  - b. administrative metadata is important for long-term preservation and access
  - c. should be automatically generated as much as possible
  - d. Agencies may need to take responsibility for describing and labeling information
  - e. Metadata can be centralized or decentralized
    - i. central index provides better performance
  - f. North Carolina already has a metadata standard, NC GILS, that can be used as the standard for future projects
2. For data (e.g. statistical data), agencies should publish data via a resource like LINC, which is standardized and timely.
3. There should be standards for document publishing and for data publishing.
4. There should be persistent identifiers so that the information can always be located.
5. The access tool should work as seamlessly as possible, but at the same provide a framework to identify the source of the information.
6. The access tool should be prominently available and simple to use (possibly on the state portal).
7. There should be different levels of searches, depending on the sophistication of the search
8. Categories for general web information should not be too specific and easily understood.
  - a. Categories can be by subject and by government organization.
9. There should be an option for browsing as well as searching.

10. Access to older webpages should be different/distinguishable from access to current sites and information.
11. Should try to combine the best qualities of the library catalog and search engine model.
12. Have live help available to assist individuals with searches.

**Current Access System: EPS: Electronic Publication System (State Auditor's Office)**

<http://www.ncauditor.net/EPSWEB/EDSDefault.asp>

The EPS is an email notification system developed by the State Auditor's Office to notify interested parties when new audit reports are published. The whole system is a combination of customized programming and off-the-shelf products. Individuals sign up for the system from the State Auditor's website, selecting which audit reports they wish to be notified about. Descriptive metadata about each audit report is created at the time of publication, which aids users in their selection of audit reports. Email is automatically sent out to the members of the EPS when audit reports are posted to the web. The email includes the metadata about the report and a link to the actual report on the web. It is a "push" system of access, instead of passively posting and forcing users to check the web for new reports. The tool could potentially be used by other state agencies to publicize their new publications. It would be particularly useful for specialized publications that have a standard format. It also keeps track of the number of people interested in a certain publication. The State Auditor's office holds the copyright to the program.

**Current Access System: FIND NC: information gateway supported by the State Library**

<Http://www.findnc.org>

Find NC is a gateway to state government information on the web. It links to general web searching and specific metadata indexes through Z39.50, the standard protocol for searching. While it was created initially in 1998, it has been plagued by problems, and never reached its full potential. It was designed to provide one-stop-shopping for state government information, both general websites, and specific databases, but the search mechanism has been less than ideal. At the time it was created, the Library anticipated that agencies would create their own metadata using NC GILS for websites to improve searching, but this didn't happen, so searches don't necessarily bring up relevant results. The current interface is not very user friendly and needs to be improved. However, Find NC could still be an access tool to current and historical information. Some advantages of the Find NC model:

- one stop shopping for state information
- ability to search information contained within databases
- possible gateway to both current and historical information
- Could provide advanced searching capabilities for specialized information

New changes to Find NC in the future

- Blue Angel Technology controls software, MetaStar Suite that runs Find NC (as well as two other library programs, Start Squad and NC ECHO), and will be upgrading the system
- Major structural changes in the new version
- Grant Pair is working on the updates which will require a complete reconfiguration of the whole system
- Changes will be made by the end of September 2004

## **Access Committee Recommendations**

1. Investigate the current state of Find NC, both ensure continued functionality after the upgrade and for future improvements.
  - a. Joel and Kristin can go over the specifications and create documentation of the current system to ensure continued functionality when the platform is upgraded.
  - b. Find ways to integrate Find NC with the State Portal.
  - c. Figure how to integrate the State Library catalog with Find NC (after upgrade).
  - d. Investigate how we can improve the user interface of Find NC.
  - e. Examine the current specialized indexes/databases in Find NC and consider what to add/drop.
  - f. Look for additional search tools already in place by state agencies that Find NC could link to and take advantage of (such as the State Auditor's search system).
  - g. New state office organizational chart (gathered by the State Data Center) could help map websites to offices.
2. CRIS pilot project
  - a. CRIS (Community Resource Information System) was formerly maintained in a database by the State Data Center. It contained information about grants from state agencies.
  - b. Look at ways to keep the information up-to-date with less work for the state agencies, such as creating GILS records and mapping them to the websites that containing information.
  - c. The State Auditor's Office maintains a database with non-profit grant information that could be combined with the CRIS project.
3. Survey the current important databases produced by state agencies and look for good models that can be searched through metadata and possibly added to FIND NC. Good models can be used as incentives for others to participate.
4. Find other agencies that could test out EPS for their publications, maybe the State Center for Health Statistics.
5. Investigate possibilities for working with state agencies to make their websites more accessible and searchable, such as improving retrieval and ranking in commercial search engines.